Screening of genital fluid for Ebola virus

Moses Soka and colleagues (October, 2016)[1] describe their semen testing programme for survivors of Ebola virus disease. This programme provides an important service to male survivors of this disease in Liberia; however, we are concerned that the real-time RT-PCR assay used might not be validated for the detection of Ebola virus in semen. Although the assay was granted emergency use authorisation by the US Food and Drug Administration for the detection of Ebola virus RNA in blood, plasma, serum, and urine, Soka and colleagues do not include supporting data for the use of this assay with semen.

Without establishing the test's parameters for semen, the interpretation of the test results is not clear. In our work[2] validating a different diagnostic platform for the detection of Ebola virus RNA in semen and vaginal fluid, we found that the limits of detection in genital fluid were significantly higher than in blood. Thus, an undetectable result in semen does not necessarily mean that there is no Ebola virus in the sample—a consideration with important implications for sexually active male survivors. Additionally, the programme only offers testing to men. Because Ebola virus has been detected in vaginal fluid, it is important that women should also be given access to validated testing of genital fluid to empower them with the ability to make evidence-based decisions on how best to keep their sexual partners safe. The screening of genital fluid for Ebola virus disease survivors with validated diagnostic platforms is a much-needed service that should be expanded to all men and women who survived Ebola virus disease.

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1 Soka MJ, Choi MJ, Baller A, et al. Prevention of sexual transmission of Ebola in Liberia through a national semen testing and counselling programme for survivors: an analysis of Ebola virus RNA results and behavioural data. *Lancet Glob Health* 2016; **4:** 736–43.

2 Loftis AJ, Quellie S, Chason K, et al. Validation of the Cepheid GeneXpert for detecting ebola virus in semen. *J Infect Dis* (in press).